



# PANEL

November 2019 / Issue #4

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Emerging writers  
Kerry Tyrrell,  
Mitchell Atkinson,  
Ildikó Noémi Nagy  
and more

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Collages: not just a  
visual art form

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Our interview with  
David Szalay

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Hungarian poetry in  
translations

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Central and Eastern  
European bookshop  
round up winter 2019

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Creating literature in  
two languages: why do  
we do it?

*Contemporary writing & art from Central Eastern Europe*

[www.panel-magazine.com](http://www.panel-magazine.com)

## *Impressum*

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## *Editorial note*

On September first I was sitting in a bar, discussing the cold spell that had settled over Budapest the previous night, when a woman leaned over and said, "I hope you like it cold. It will not be hot again this year." I demurred that, quite to the contrary, I expected an Indian summer, which only elicited a noncommittal shrug. Whether she was right or not, I have found her sense of fatalism more or less in sync with a certain region-wide anxiety that grips Central Eastern Europe during this time, each year. That is, that fall will live up to its name and descend on the whole territory like a palletful of bricks. Invariably, this seems to be the case.

Summer reaches through September and into October like a cat stretching in a spot of morning sun on the windowsill. When the spot is gone, it contracts, body tightening before it dives onto the floor. Of course, instead of leaping gracefully to the ground and padding away, we'll be leaping out of the abstract world of this simile and into winter. The length of autumn, then, is roughly analogous to the time it takes a cat to decide to get up and move; this is never, as far as I have observed, a prolonged deliberative process.

We are presenting this issue of Panel magazine during exactly such a window, leaves suspended in strips of orange and yellow in the boughs of trees, caught and pressed there by currents of unseasonable warmth. And we'd like to take this opportunity to remind you that it's never as bad as you think it's going to be. To do that, we're bringing you the very best art and English language literature from Central and Eastern Europe, wrapped in collage and presented in style by our talented art director, Maria Gyarmati.

So, hunker down. Make your grim prognostications and scowl at the shortening daylight hours. Swirl your brandy and toss another log onto the fire, or, failing that, stretch your blanketed feet toward a space heater and toss open our magazine.

A happy cuffing season to you all, and we'll see you on the other side,  
DR, on behalf of all the editors of Panel



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## *The Premonition*

Kerry Tyrrell

One morning in late February, Viktor Kotz woke earlier than usual to find that it was very cold in his room. He pulled the blankets over his head in an attempt to return to sleep, and he tried to warm himself by moving his body to-and-fro under the covers. The situation didn't improve much, although as the minutes passed and he adjusted to the transition from sleep to being awake, he experienced a small surge of happiness in realising that it was Saturday. He'd not found the usual levels of enjoyment and satisfaction in his job over the past week, for he felt as if his boss had increased his workload by a considerable amount without once praising him for any of his previous work. It was always difficult to know where one stood with that man, who everybody called "The Chief."

Just one day earlier, for example, Viktor had witnessed one of his younger colleagues at the bank suffer a severe dressing-down in front of several customers, simply

for neglecting to inform his new client of the necessity that, at the very minimum, six electronic card transactions were to be carried out each month. In truth, he feared "The Chief"—his unattainable standards of excellence and his temper—and at the conclusion of each workday he was thankful if he hadn't been summoned to his office for a one-on-one. The way the job market was looking, it would not be a good time to be an unemployed bank teller, especially in Kőszeg, and for this reason he felt that he had at least something to be grateful about. He sat in bed awhile, blowing fog from his mouth in short breaths.

After the sun had risen and he had set the table with kiflis, two kinds of cheese, slices of cucumber, and kolbász, he began to feel that this day would prove significant to him in some way. It was difficult to pinpoint what it was exactly that made him feel this way, or from where the feeling had come. Nonetheless, by the time he had

finished eating his breakfast, the feeling had grown even stronger, and after he had showered and changed from his pyjamas into a starched white shirt and a pair of blue jeans, he was absolutely convinced it was a premonition. He peered intently at his face in the mirror while he shaved. No, he could not tell in what manner it would manifest itself, but he was certain that some life-altering event would take place.

"Sometimes," he wrote in his diary after shaving, "just the very feeling of imminent change is all that is needed to break free from the shackles of the mundane. Once the kernel of a thought or idea has been planted, it has no choice but to sprout, its flowers no choice but to bloom. The fruit of an opportunity tastes sweetest once it has been seized. And what is life but a continuous series of opportunities? Does the sparrow hesitate before the seed? Never! It simply takes what it needs. Today, I feel that my life will be touched by some great event..."

As he walked through the town a short time later, he carried with him a sense of purpose that he realised his life had recently lacked.

It was a perfect winter afternoon—cold and clear, with a clean blue sky over the white, newly laid snow, and the fresh air carried the distinctive smell of damp trees and bricks. He looked at his reflection in the window of an ABC and saw a well dressed man with a plaid scarf and blue jeans. He had decided not only to prepare a pörkölt for that evening's dinner, but also a gulyás for Sunday lunch, and so he entered the shop to purchase the items he would need.

Shortly afterwards, as he paid for his groceries, he had the impression that the young woman who worked behind the till of the ABC had taken a special interest in his vegetable purchases. Perhaps, he thought to himself, she wonders what I will make with my onions, red and white peppers, potatoes, carrots and parsnips. Maybe, he mused, she would like it if I invited her over for dinner. But when he turned to look at her again, after placing his change back in his wallet, he saw that she was already engaged in conversation with another customer. A man was describing in great detail his method for preparing bouillabaisse, using extravagant gesticulations to demonstrate his seasoning techniques. The woman had smiled involuntarily, Viktor saw quite

clearly, at the very mention of the word saffron. No, it would be best to head home now, for this was not a day to be wasted in blind alleys.

Kőszeg, a small town, was in the middle of an unusually bitter winter. The streets, which curled around one another, lanes intertwining with roads—were lined with a thick layer of soft, crunchy white snow. Viktor walked on, and the sky, which, only a little earlier, had been a brilliant blue, now clouded over and created a rather gloomy atmosphere. Before long, the cold seemed to develop an overbearing quality, as if it intended to freeze everything it touched. As Viktor started through the woods which led to his home, sleet began to fall once again, and clumps of snow dropped from the trees above as blackbirds and red squirrels scampered for shelter. It was a most insistent frost, and the sight of the falling snow seemed to Viktor a bad omen. Was this day not to be as auspicious as he'd believed? The snow began to fall more heavily, the cold growing even more determined, and Viktor lost his footing time and time again. He was starting to feel weak; his boots now seemed much too heavy, and he found it difficult to lift them from the imprints they left in the snowdrifts. A patch of green moss

on top of a rock protruded from the white blanket that lay all around him. It looked as soft as a pillow, and he thought that to stop and rest awhile on that patch of moss might make a wonderful respite from the cold. Indeed, a heavy tiredness was beginning to close in on everything, and the urge to sleep was becoming stronger and stronger. As he was laying his rucksack down to rest, he glimpsed a tavern through the trees on a hill beyond a clearing, and this gave him the will to move on. In order to lighten his load and ensure he had the strength to continue, he dumped his red and white peppers, potatoes, onions, carrots and parsnips into the snow, where they quickly disappeared into the crevices created by their landing. This buoyed him somewhat, and he moved forward with renewed energy.

He approached the tavern, which was called Erdő Vendéglő. The windows were foggy with condensation, and it seemed as if a great many people were gathered inside. Through the cold glass, the faint amber glow of lamps and candles brought a smile to his lips. He pressed his ear against the window and heard, faintly, the sounds of laughter and music. After wiping his boots on a mat at the doorstep, which read 'Well, come

Inn!', Viktor opened the door and entered the tavern. The atmosphere inside seemed friendly. The smell of roasted meat inundated the room and overpowered Viktor. He became instantly hungry.

In one corner of the large room, a band consisting of a violin, guitar, cimbalom and double bass played music to a small crowd of ten or so people. The band were dressed in authentic Hungarian folk costume, and were made up of three women and a man, with the man on cimbalom. Their audience circled one another, linking arms and stomping their boots on the wooden floor of the tavern. Beyond them, leaning on the bar, were a group of men who clapped their hands in time with the music, providing a regular rhythm for the dancers, as well as contributing to the generally festive atmosphere. A few other customers sat around

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beer and smiled through a haze of sleepy beatitude.

Viktor approached the bar and ordered a glass of cognac. A glass of cognac in cold weather such as this, he said to the barmaid as he handed over his coins, should be obligatory rather than optional. The barmaid neither smiled nor frowned at this comment, and, after taking payment and filling his glass with a ruby brown liquid, she leaned against a wall behind the bar and watched the musicians play, wearing a look of heavy severity on her face. Just then, as the song the band were performing came to an end, the violinist—a woman with long, rather tangled chestnut hair and a soft, open face—began to walk through the group of dancers, playing an extravagant variation of a well known folk melody. She carried on playing even after the

Photo by Vyachaslav Smirnov

